



Department of Arts and Culture

# **NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY FRAMEWORK**

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## **FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER OF ARTS, CULTURE, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, DR BS NGUBANE**

A person's language is in many ways a "second skin": a natural possession of every normal human being, with which we use to express our hopes and ideals, articulate our thoughts and values, explore our experience and customs, and construct our society and the laws that govern it. It is through language that we function as human beings in an ever-changing world. The right to use the official languages of our choice has therefore been recognised in our Bill of Rights, and our Constitution acknowledges that the languages of our people are a resource that should be harnessed.

I am particularly proud that, after a thorough process of consultation, we are finally in a position to announce a framework for a language policy for South Africa. This is the finalisation of a process that started in 1995, when I appointed the Language Plan Task Group (LANGTAG) to advise me on a framework for a coherent language policy and plan. This step was essential in view of the lack of tolerance for linguistic diversity and the resultant "multilingualism is a costly problem" approach evident in some sectors of our society, and the growing criticism from language stakeholders of the tendency towards unilingualism in South Africa.

The National Language Policy Framework is based on the outcome of our consultation processes, both through LANGTAG and subsequently through my Department's efforts in collaboration with my Advisory Panel on Language Policy. The policy framework is fundamental to the management of our diverse language resources and the achievement of government's goal to promote democracy, justice, equity and national unity. It is in this spirit that the promotion of all 11 official languages of our country, as provided for in the Constitution, takes centre stage in the policy.

This Policy Framework also takes cognisance of the fact that the value of our languages is largely determined by their economic, social and political usage. When a language loses its value in these spheres the status of the language diminishes. This Policy Framework also takes into account that we are faced with the challenge of globalisation and that our indigenous languages should be part of the rapidly expanding technological environment. Hence, it intends to reaffirm the status and use of the indigenous languages of South Africa.

I sincerely trust that all South Africans will embrace this National Language Policy Framework as their own. I believe that collectively we have to ensure that the policy becomes a reality in our lives, affirming and making us proud of our unique South African identity.

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**DR BS NGUBANE, MP**

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DAC	Department of Arts and Culture
DoE	Department of Education
HLT	Human Language Technologies
LANGTAG	Language Plan Task Group
LiEP	Language in Education Policy
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NLS	National Language Service
PanSALB	Pan South African Language Board
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASL	South African Sign Language
TISSA	Telephone Interpreting Service for South Africa

## SECTION 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Approximately 25 different languages are spoken in South Africa, of which 11 have been granted official status in terms of section 6 of the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996), on the grounds that their usage includes about 98% of the total population.
- 1.1.2 The 11 official languages are isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu and siSwati (referred to as the Nguni language group); Sesotho, Sepedi and Setswana (referred to as the Sotho language group); Tshivenda, Xitsonga, English and Afrikaans.
- 1.1.3 South Africa is therefore a multilingual country. A striking characteristic of multilingualism in South Africa is the fact that several indigenous languages are spoken across provincial borders; shared by speech communities from different provinces.
- 1.1.4 There is currently a strong awareness of the need to intensify efforts to develop the previously marginalised indigenous languages and to promote multilingualism if South Africans are to be liberated from undue reliance on the utilisation of non-indigenous languages as the dominant, official languages of the state.
- 1.1.5 To date management of linguistic diversity in post-apartheid South Africa has been made problematic by the lack of a clearly defined language policy, leading to the use of English and Afrikaans as the most dominant languages in the socio-economic and political domains of our society.
- 1.1.6 After eight years of democracy, South Africa has now arrived at a crucial point in its history. South Africans have to respond to their linguistic and cultural

diversity and to the challenges of constitutional multilingualism, hence the introduction of this National Language Policy Framework.

1.1.7 The Policy Framework not only initiates a fresh approach to multilingualism in South Africa, but strongly encourages the utilisation of the indigenous languages as official languages in order to foster and promote national unity. It takes into account the broad acceptance of linguistic diversity, social justice, the principle of equal access to public services and programmes, and respect for language rights.

1.1.8 This document sets out an enabling framework for a coherent multilingual dispensation within the parameters of the Constitution.

## **1.2 Historical context**

1.2.1 Since the first occupation of South Africa by the Dutch in 1652, through successive periods of British rule, the Union of South Africa, and subsequently the establishment of the Republic of South Africa and the apartheid regime, government language policy and the power elite failed to recognise South Africa's linguistic diversity. This situation was reversed only with the advent of democracy in 1994 and the Constitutional provisions on official multilingualism.

1.2.2 This resulted in language inequality, and the dominance of English and Afrikaans created an unequal relationship between these languages and the African languages.

1.2.3 Colonial and apartheid language policies, together with political and socio-economic policies, therefore gave rise to a hierarchy of languages, the inequality of which that reflected the structures of racial and class inequality that characterised South African society.

- 1.2.4 All these practices engendered the corollary status of the indigenous languages and language varieties of the African people and of other marginalised groups, including the Deaf and the Blind – enforcing negative stereotypes of the African languages, which are held not only by English and Afrikaans speakers, but even by many of the speakers of the African languages themselves.
- 1.2.5 The situation is compounded by the fact that, owing to short-sighted and bureaucratic attitudes against implementing multilingualism public and private institutions have a tendency to take ad hoc language decisions that negate the constitutional provisions and requirements relating to languages.

### **1.3 Legislative context**

- 1.3.1 Section 6 of the Constitution provides the principal legal framework for multilingualism, the development of the official languages and the promotion of respect and tolerance for South Africa's linguistic diversity. It determines the language rights of citizens, which must be honoured through national language policies.
- 1.3.2 The Constitution emphasises that all official languages must “enjoy parity of esteem” and be treated equitably, thereby enhancing the status and use of indigenous languages, with government taking “legislative and other measures” to regulate and monitor the use of disadvantaged indigenous languages.
- 1.3.3 The Constitution mandates change to the language situation throughout the country, giving social and political recognition to hitherto disadvantaged language groups on the basis of the expressed needs of communities and interest groups.

- 1.3.4 Section 6(2) of the Constitution requires mechanisms to be put in place to develop these indigenous languages.
- 1.3.5 Section 6(3) and (4) contain language-related provisions for national and provincial governments, whereby government departments must use at least two of the official languages.
- 1.3.6 To promote linguistic diversity further, section 6(5) provides for the establishment of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) to promote multilingualism and see to the development and use not only of the official languages, but also of the Khoi, Nama and San languages, as well as SA Sign Language(s). PanSALB is also to cultivate respect for the Heritage Languages spoken by some sections of our community and for those languages that are used for religious purposes.
- 1.3.7 Other relevant provisions pertaining to language matters are made elsewhere in the Constitution. Section 9(3) protects against unfair discrimination on the grounds of language, while sections 30 and 31(1) refer to people's rights in terms of cultural, religious and linguistic participation and enjoyment. Section 35(3) and (4) refer to the language rights of arrested, detained and accused persons, with a particular emphasis on the right to fair trial with proceedings conducted or interpreted into the language of that individual's choice.
- 1.3.8 The Department of Education (DoE) introduced a "Language in Education Policy" (LiEP), which stresses multilingualism as an extension of cultural diversity and an integral part of building a non-racial South Africa. The underlying principle is to retain the learner's home language for learning and teaching, but to encourage learners to acquire additional languages as well. LiEP deals with such matters as language(s) of learning and teaching in public schools, school curricula, and the language-related duties of provincial departments of education and school governing bodies.



1.3.9 The Constitution and related legislation clearly advocate the promotion of multilingualism in South Africa. This policy framework must therefore cater adequately for the harmonisation of language policy at all three levels of government and articulate clear policy positions on the status and use of the indigenous official languages in all nine provinces in South Africa.

## **SECTION 2: KEY ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY**

### **2.1 Aims**

The language policy takes cognisance of the constitutional provisions on multilingualism and is in concert with government's goals for economic, socio-political and educational growth. Its aims are to –

- 2.1.1 promote the equitable use of the 11 official languages;
- 2.1.2 facilitate equitable access to government services, knowledge and information;
- 2.1.3 ensure redress for the previously marginalised official indigenous languages;
- 2.1.4 initiate and sustain a vibrant discourse on multilingualism with all language communities;
- 2.1.5 encourage the learning of other official indigenous languages to promote national unity, and linguistic and cultural diversity; and
- 2.1.6 promote good language management for efficient public service administration to meet client expectations and needs.

### **2.2 Principles**

The language policy is based on the following principles:

- 2.2.1 A commitment to the promotion of language equity and language rights as required by a democratic dispensation;

- 2.2.2 Recognising that languages are resources to maximise knowledge, expertise and full participation in the political and socio-economic domains;
- 2.2.3 Working in collaborative partnerships to promote constitutional multilingualism;
- 2.2.4 Preventing the use of any language for the purposes of exploitation, domination and discrimination; and
- 2.2.5 Enhancing people-centredness in addressing the interests, needs and aspirations of a wide range of language communities through ongoing dialogue and debate.

## **2.3 Approach**

The approach recognises the following:

- 2.3.1 Promoting multilingualism in South Africa requires efforts that do not discount the knowledge that exists in societies where indigenous official languages are prominent. This will be facilitated by the use and involvement of communities as participants in the processes of language development.
- 2.3.2 It will be expedient to engage language specialists to assist the process of developing functional multilingual programmes through research and the dissemination of findings.
- 2.3.3 Facilitating cooperation and the sharing of responsibilities among SADC member states will accelerate language development.
- 2.3.4 It will be necessary to conduct policy reviews at reasonable intervals in order to monitor progress towards a fully multilingual South African society.

2.3.5 A community-based approach to the promotion of multilingualism is the most viable one, given South Africa's highly pluralistic society. There must be a decentralised and participatory approach to language planning and policy implementation, which harnesses technical expertise for the transfer of knowledge and skills.

## 2.4 Scope

The scope or provisions of the policy are as follows:

2.4.1 All government structures (national, provincial and local government), as well as institutions exercising a public power or performing a public function in terms of legislation are bound by this Language Policy Framework.

2.4.2 In promoting multilingualism provinces will formulate their policies in line with the guidelines contained in this Policy Framework, taking into account their regional circumstances, and the needs and preferences of communities, as stated in the Constitution.

2.4.3 Local governments will determine the language use and preferences of their communities within an enabling provincial language policy framework. Upon determination of the language use and preference of communities, local governments must, in broad consultation with their communities, develop, publicise and implement a multilingual policy.

2.4.4 The official languages will be used in all legislative activities, including *Hansard* publications, as a matter of right as required: provided that in the case of provincial legislatures, regional circumstances will determine the language(s) to be used.

**Comment [J.S1]:** This is to query the finding numbered 13. Note that the scope of application, which we thoroughly understand as it is bound to our mandate. Therefore to claim that we do not seem to be clear whether the DAC was mandated by Cabinet to ensure the establishment of LUs, is ludicrous. The very fact that we have the policy and an implementation plan, approved by Cabinet in 2003, means to us that we are not just proactive, we are progressive, we take our work seriously, more so because we understand the turf not just in terms of content, but the procedures of government as we understand them. We did the policy and implementation plan, got them through the laid out channels of communication, received approval; we got the DG to write to all government ? The documents are very clear. Evidence of it consists in the actions we have taken about the matter, we ensured that the DG writes to every department about the requirement,

2.4.5 Government will encourage, and where necessary support, private enterprises to develop and implement their own language policies in accordance with the national language policy framework.

2.4.6 To promote multilingualism this policy determines the use of different languages in government structures as follows:

**2.4.6.1 Working language(s)/language(s) of record:** By consensus, each government structure must agree on a working language(s) (for both intra and interdepartmental communication purposes); Provided that where practically possible no person will be prevented from using the language(s) of his or her preference. For the purposes of conducting meetings or performing specific tasks every effort must be made to utilise language facilitation facilities such as translation and/or interpreting (both consecutive and simultaneous, as well as whispered interpreting) where practically possible.

**2.4.6.2. Communication with members of the public:** For *official correspondence* purposes, the language of the citizen's choice must be used. All *oral communication* must take place in the preferred official language of the target audience. If necessary, every effort must be made to utilise language facilitation facilities such as interpreting (consecutive, simultaneous, telephone and whispered interpreting) where practically possible.

**2.4.6.3 Government publications:** A publication programme of functional multilingualism should be followed by **national** government departments in those cases that do not require publication in all 11 official languages.

**2.4.6.4** Where the effective and stable operation of government at any level requires comprehensive communication of information, it must be published in **all 11 official languages** and, in the provinces, in all the official languages prescribed in the Province.

**2.4.6.5** In cases where government documents will not be made available in all 11 official languages, **national** government departments must publish documents **simultaneously in at least six languages**. The selection of languages will be made as follows:

- At least one from the Nguni group (isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu and siSwati);
- At least one from the Sotho group (Sepedi, Sesotho and Setswana);
- Tshivenda;
- Xitsonga;
- English; and
- Afrikaans.

**2.4.6.6** A principle of rotation must be applied when selecting languages for publishing government documents in the Nguni and Sotho groups.

**2.4.6.7 International communication:** Government communication at the international level will normally be in English or ad hoc in the preferred language of the country concerned.

## **SECTION 3: BUILDING HUMAN CAPACITY**

- 3.1 The implementation of the language policy will increase the demand for translation and editing work and interpreting services, especially in the indigenous languages. The core of translation expertise in these languages will have to be expanded both in government departments and in the private sector, i.e. freelance language practitioners such as translators, editors and interpreters will have to be developed. The increased need for the services of professional language practitioners will require further skills training.
- 3.2 The establishment of language units in each national government department and in each province will also impact on the scope of the activities of the National Language Service (NLS). The NLS will be required to coordinate the management of policy implementation by facilitating training for language unit staff in language planning activities and supporting the work programmes of these units. The NLS will also be responsible for coordinating the development of training programmes for translators, editors and interpreters, and establishing operational guidelines on quality issues.
- 3.3 The areas of terminography and terminology will likewise be affected. The increase in translation work will require accelerated development of terminology in the official languages and of a National Termbank that is accessible to both government and freelance language practitioners.
- 3.4 The availability of Human Language Technology (HLT) applications (e.g. machine-assisted translation, translation memories, spellcheckers) for the indigenous languages will play a major supporting role in language facilitation activities.
- 3.5 The size options for language units will be determined and skills training in this area will be prioritised after the number of official languages to be used

have been considered. Units consisting of four or more professional staff will require clerks.

- 3.6 Capacity building in the identified areas of language facilitation will take place in close collaboration with service providers such as tertiary institutions offering SAQA-accredited programmes and courses in language practice, translation and editing, interpreting, language planning, terminography and lexicography.



## SECTION 4: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- 4.1 The progressive phasing in of the implementation of the policy in the short, medium and long term is the preferred strategy at all levels.
- 4.2 Regarding government publications, implementation will be phased in flexibly and pragmatically by government structures over a period of at least three years. The advantage of the gradual phasing in methodology is that departments will be able to develop capacity incrementally and manage the implementation process more effectively.
- 4.3 Government structures will have time to plan their budgets by gradually increasing allocations over the MTEF period and planning operations in line with the resources required for successful policy implementation.
- 4.4 Monitoring mechanisms for assuring the quality of translation and editing services will be developed.
- 4.5 In collaboration with PanSALB, the Department of Arts and Culture will monitor progress and report at specified intervals to all relevant authorities.
- 4.6 Policy reviews will be conducted regularly and recommendations will be made for amendments where necessary so that budgets can be adjusted accordingly.
- 4.7 The infrastructure required to operationalise the policy will be put in place. This will include the establishment of language units in all national departments and in the provinces to manage –
  - intra and interdepartmental oral communication in all spheres of government;
  - intra and interdepartmental written communication in all spheres of

government;

- oral communication with the public;
- written communication with the public; and
- international communication where applicable.

4.8 Other implementation mechanisms that will be operationalised are a Language Code of Conduct for Public Servants, the establishment of the SA Language Practitioners' Council, a Telephone Interpreting Service for South Africa (TISSA), a strategy for the development of the previously marginalized languages and an HLT Strategy.

4.9 Additional government responsibilities regarding the implementation of the national language policy are as follows:

- Supporting the development of human resources required for successful implementation of multilingualism;
- Regulating the language facilitation profession, i.e. translation, interpreting and terminology development, through development and appropriate legislation;
- Supporting special redress efforts and/or programmes for the marginalised indigenous languages, i.e. African languages and the Khoi, San and Nama languages, as well as SA Sign Language(s); and
- Supporting the learning and teaching of all official South African languages at all levels of schooling.

## GLOSSARY

Bilingualism	The practice of using two languages (not necessarily with equal competence in both).
Development of a language	The promotion of a language by graphisation, standardisation and elaboration of functions so that the language can be used in the media, education, legal and administrative systems, etc.; and by generally providing scope for the publication of literary works in that language.
Editing	The act of effecting corrections to language and/or style in written texts.
Equity	The quality of fairness, impartiality; even-handed dealing; what is fair and right.
Functional multilingualism	Refers to the choice of a particular language(s) in a particular situation, determined by the context in which the language is used, i.e. the <i>function</i> , the <i>audience</i> and the <i>message</i> for which it is employed.
Heritage Languages	Languages not indigenous to a country but brought by immigrants.
Historically disadvantaged languages	In the South African context, these are the languages that were assigned low status by former powerful groups and which were, as a result, not used or developed for use in the media, education (after early primary school), or in public or economically significant domains. Little support was given to the development of verbal art forms in these languages. They include indigenous languages, Heritage Languages and SASL.
Human Language Technologies	The application of knowledge of language to the development of computer systems that can recognise, understand, interpret and generate human language in all forms, i.e. the development of applications that make it possible for human beings to interact with computers.
Indigenous language	A language native to a country.
Interpreting	The act of transposing an utterance from a source language into a target language in spoken form.
Language awareness	Sensitivity to how language is used in society, whether the users are accorded their language rights, and how language is used to empower or disempower.
Language equality	In terms of the Constitution, all languages are to receive equal respect. The equal treatment of two or more languages, especially with regard to official domains of society such as legislation, justice, public administration and instruction.
Language equity	The fairness of language provision and/or treatment of two or more languages. Matters such as the number of speakers and the status of a

	language may influence policy to determine the domains of use of a particular language. This use may not necessarily be equal. "(A) state cannot usefully employ the languages of all its citizens and may consequently strictly limit itself to practising only in its language(s) that is/are official, or certain languages, in one way or the other" (Turi, 1993:14 - 15).
Language planning	Language planning focuses on solutions to language problems by formulating alternative goals, means and outcomes. It involves processes of regulating and improving languages through language development.
Language policy	An official decision/decreed on the status of various languages spoken in heterogeneous/multilingual communities, for example which language will be the national or official language, which languages will be used as regional languages and what their status will be.
Language rights	Laws determining the situations in which citizens can make language choices.
Language units	Government agencies in departments and provinces to deal with specific language issues of that department and/or province arising from the National Language Policy and to liaise with other departments on language matters.
Lexicography	The activity or profession of compiling dictionaries.
Machine translation systems	Computer systems that translate electronic texts from one language to another.
Marginalized language	Any official language that is excluded from official use or of which use is discouraged in formal settings (e.g. education, health care). "Marginalized" usually implies the low status of the language and possibly the speakers. For example, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, isiNdebele and siSwati are regarded as marginalized languages in South Africa.
Medium of instruction (language of learning)	The language of classroom instruction as indicated by curriculum and language policy. "Language of learning" implies a slight shift to include the concept that more than one language may be in use and learners may be accessing one rather than the official medium.
Multilingualism	The use of three or more languages by an individual or by a group of speakers such as the inhabitants of a particular region or a nation.
Official language	A language used in government, courts of law, education, business, and the media.
Terminology	Standardised technical terms established for a specific subject field.
Translation	The act of transposing a text from a source language to another (target) language in written form.

(LandelaN: Language Policy/Language Policy Framework\_English)